

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 001693

SIPDIS

STATE FOR PM/WRA, WHA/PPC, WHA/CEN, INL/LP, AND S/CT
DOD FOR DTRA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/12/2015

TAGS: [MASS](#) [MARR](#) [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [SNAR](#) [KLIG](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: SEND LAWYERS, FUNDS AND GUNNY: SA/LW DESTRUCTION
AND SEMINARS A POSSIBILITY IF HOAF ACTS DECISIVELY

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Paul Tuebner;
Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Department of State Small Arms and Light Weapons (SA/LW) program officer (PM/WRA) and Department of Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) ordnance destruction team visited Honduras August 1-5 to review possible future technical assistance. Team and PolMilOff met with Vice Minister of Defense (VMOD) Julio Edgardo Perez Matamoros, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs (VMFA) Juan Alberto Lara Bueso, Vice Chief of the Honduran Armed Forces (VCHOD) Brigadier General Nelson Willys Mejia Mejia, as well as logistical, operational, and base commanders. Although the general reception of the team and its goals was positive, there were several notable exceptions of resistance. Decades of neglect, poor physical security, and improper accountability and storage have all worked together to create a security nightmare and a criminal's one-stop shopping paradise. The inspections revealed situations begging for U.S. support and expertise, but whether the Honduran Government (GOH) will take advantage of the small arms/light weapons destruction or the seminars on storage, maintenance, and security is still up in the air. Currently, Minister of Defense (MOD) Federico Breve Travieso has informally requested the seminars and is drafting an official request. Post is also considering approaching the Attorney General and Frontier Police about destroying impounded weapons and ammunition. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) Department of State Small Arms and Light Weapons (SA/LW) program officer (PM/WRA) and Department of Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) ordnance destruction team visited Honduras August 1-5 to review possible future technical assistance. Team and PolMilOff met with Vice Minister of Defense (VMOD) Julio Edgardo Perez Matamoros, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs (VMFA) Juan Alberto Lara Bueso, Vice Chief of the Honduran Armed Forces (VCHOD) Brigadier General Nelson Willys Mejia Mejia, as well as logistical, operational, and base commanders. The VMOD and VMFA seemed very receptive to the goals of the team and admitted that Honduras has problems with excess small arms and munitions and their storage. When the team and PolMilOff spoke with VCHOD Mejia however, he stated that the Honduran forces had no excess weapons and that they needed all that they had for their reserves.

3. (C) Team and PolMilOff then spoke with logistical commander and current demolition commander. Both commanders were very interested in U.S. support for their destruction program and in the seminars that were offered by the DTRA contingent. The demolition commander was interested in special courses in addition to the basic seminar offered. He and one of his trainers have received explosive ordnance destruction (EOD) training in the U.S. and were interested in specialized training, above the proposed levels. The Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF) has already started a vigorous ammunition validation and destruction program but are having some problems with the associated costs and logistics. (COMMENT: The destruction team was trained with U.S. funding. The current Chief of the Honduran Armed Forces (CHOD), General Romeo Orlando Vasquez Velasquez, requested the training and started this program when he was head of the Army. The team seems to be competent and has received compliments from the U.S. MILGP Commander. The impetus for this destruction team was the explosion of a munitions bunker in Naco military base in the mid 1990's and U.S.-prompted inspections that discovered unsafe conditions and thefts. END COMMENT.)

4. (C) Team and PolMilOff visited four different sites: two Air Force bases, a regional Army logistic center and base, and the HOAF depot facility. DAO, JTF-B, and U.S. MILGP assistance facilitated excellent access to all sites. Each base commander was interested in the seminars and the possibility of destroying excess arms and munitions. Each facility visited had large numbers of weapons that would qualify under the program, but would require the approval of HOAF leadership to approve their destruction. In addition, each site would benefit greatly from the seminars, particularly on the appropriate storage and security for weapons and munitions.

15. (C) The weapons repair facility/depot (Cale) is currently undergoing a complete inventory. The HOAF has switched to M-16 rifles for its armed forces, M-1 rifles for its military academies, and is keeping its former weapons, FALs, as a reserve. Weapons are issued according to troop numbers when they join and they keep those weapons throughout their own career. Therefore, all weapons in these facilities are above and beyond those in use by actual troops. The Cale facility contains about 8,000-10,000 FAL rifles, hundreds of Israeli UZI machine guns, and approximately another 5,000 or so M-16s, all of which are being kept as reserves. In addition, Cale has more than 1,000 older bolt action rifles held in reserve for the military academies. There were stacked piles of rifle parts and older rifles as well as improperly stored rocket propelled grenade (RPG) launchers and ammunition. The individual in charge of the facility said that due to the inventory, he could not yet determine what was excess or not. Team members noted that there were easily over 10,000 pieces in the inventory that would qualify for the destruction program and still leave plenty as reserves. Decades of neglect, poor physical security, and improper accountability and storage have all worked together to create a security nightmare and a criminal's one-stop shopping paradise.

16. (C) The Naco facility had less weapons, but a greater security hazard and much more concern about danger from improper storage of ammo and weapons. After the inspection, the team's consensus was that if something was not done soon, history would repeat itself and there would be another large scale accident. The significant number of "excess arms" were those which are secured by the armed forces, but are under the control and jurisdiction of the Honduran Attorney General's office (Public Ministry). Approximately 5,000 FALs and 500 AK-47s have been impounded and are currently in limbo over ownership. The commander of the base and the HOAF leadership would like to have these weapons destroyed - to remove them from their area of responsibility and from their list of problems. (COMMENT: In 2001, there was a theft of more than 230 of these AK-47s from the locked warehouse. At least some of these weapons were confiscated in an alleged drugs for arms deal earlier this year. Bars were placed on the windows after the break-in, but other security procedures have not been improved since that time. In addition, there is ongoing litigation over the ownership of these weapons and the responsibility for debts associated with them between the Honduran government and two U.S. firms with a final dispensation still pending. END COMMENT.)

17. (C) The two Air Force bases, in La Mesa and Toncontin, were in somewhat better shape - probably more due to lower amounts of weapons and relatively higher prestige and budget within the armed forces. They did have issues with storage and maintenance of their munitions and their various weapons. Older, excess aviation bombs were their major concern. PolMilOff noticed stacks of .50 caliber guns and was informed that they were the machine guns removed from no longer flying aircraft, Corsairs and F-86s. In addition to the .50 cal machine guns, there were rockets that would qualify under this program.

18. (C) Comment: All commanders were interested in the seminars offered by DTRA and Redstone Arsenal. The NCOs and junior officers seemed impressed with the knowledge of the Redstone staff sergeant and seemed much more open and responsive to questions and comments than their superiors. The GOH in general and HOAF in particular are very concerned about the regional aspects of small arms proliferation and verbally stated that they were interested in reducing excess weapons and munitions. Commitment to the SA/LW destruction will be a harder sell. Although the CHOD has publicly stated that he wants to and is destroying excess arms, his second in command told the team that there were no excess weapons, which the team then went on to observe. The lower level leadership seems eager to participate in both programs. However, without an impetus from all levels, but especially senior levels, this visit and offer will have fallen upon deaf ears.

19. (C) Comment continued: Post is hoping that a request for the Redstone seminars will come within the next few weeks. U.S. MILGP has delivered a letter to the MOD and the CHOD, reminding them of this opportunity and that in the next 30 days they need to compile a comprehensive list of their excess munitions slated for destruction. In addition to the two possible requests, three of the commanders requested assistance/permission in destruction of unusable equipment, equipment that was donated to them by the USG - as in old non-working vehicles that could be sold for scrap and the .50 cal machine-guns that were removed from former U.S.-provided aircraft. The decisions and actions of the HOAF and the MOD have been somewhat mercurial, especially with the upcoming national elections on November 27. Although the decision is in their hands, once they make their decision to take advantage of this opportunity, the USG needs to be willing and able to accept that hand-off and sprint for the finish

line. End Comment.

110. (C) This cable was cleared by PM/WRA. See also septels
from DATT with additional reporting on the SA/LW visit.
Williard